



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE FULL COMMITTEE HEARING ON SECURITY FAILURES AT THE LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY

Today the committee meets to take testimony on the latest and still developing nuclear weapons security failure at the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Let me apologize to members for the lack of the normal notice for this hearing, but Mr. Skelton and I both felt that the seriousness and urgency of the situation merited having this hearing as quickly as possible in order to better understand the specifics of the situation at hand.

In many respects, this afternoon's hearing gives me a sense of déjà vu. Since 1998, this committee has been deeply involved in investigating and legislating fixes to address the fundamental breakdown in national security procedures within the DOE nuclear weapons complex.

What began as a look at serious weaknesses in the Department's foreign visitor program, soon transformed into a counterintelligence revelation that stunned the country — the People's Republic of China somehow obtained U.S. nuclear weapons design information.

The Department of Energy national laboratories, and Los Alamos in particular, were quickly identified as the most likely source for the loss of this sensitive information. We now know that an individual working in the weapons design "X Division" downloaded volumes of nuclear weapons design and test data from his secure classified computer into his unsecure, unclassified system and onto portable tapes. Though never charged with espionage, Mr. Wen Ho Lee was subsequently arrested and charged with mishandling classified nuclear weapons information and potentially exposing it to compromise.

The seriousness of the security shortfalls identified during this incident led President Clinton to task the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board to examine the security threat at the Department's weapons laboratories and the adequacy of measures taken to address it. The Board found that "DOE and the weapons laboratories have a deeply rooted culture of low regard for and, at times, hostility to security issues." The Chairman of this Board, former senator Warren Rudman, testified before this committee that the Board concluded that the Department of Energy was bureaucratically and culturally incapable of reforming itself.

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The Board, therefore, recommended that the national security functions of the Department be placed under the direction of a totally independent agency or as a semi-autonomous agency within the Department. This latter construction was adopted in the Fiscal Year 2000 National Defense Authorization Act, which created the new National Nuclear Security Administration. In addition, Congress enacted sweeping reforms of the law and procedures governing how the Department conducts security and counterintelligence responsibilities.

These efforts were met with a level of resistance and hostility by Secretary Richardson that continues to this very day. Rather than accepting and implementing the legal tools passed by Congress and enacted into law by the President to address this critical problem, the Department of Energy has been engaged in a pattern of legal obfuscation and evasion in order to frustrate the clearly stated intent of the Congress in this area.

Despite the continuing efforts to circumvent key portions of the DOE reorganization legislation, the Department has been proceeding with changes in security procedures. This progress led to some hope that we had finally turned the corner on this problem and that many of the fundamental problems universally recognized and highlighted by the Rudman report were finally being rectified.

But, while I recognize that this investigation is still in its early stages and much is not yet known, I also believe there is enough known to conclude that the DOE national laboratory complex and Los Alamos in particular still suffer from serious, disturbing and unacceptable deficiencies in how they safeguard the nation's most sensitive nuclear secrets.

With us today to update on the incident at hand and discuss the various issues it raises are:

- The Honorable T. J. Glauthier
Deputy Secretary of Energy
- Brigadier General Thomas F. Gioconda
Acting Deputy Administrator for Defense Programs
National Nuclear Security Administration
Department of Energy
- Gen. Eugene Habiger
Director
Office of Security and Emergency Operations
Department of Energy
- Mr. Edward J. Curran
Director
Office of Counterintelligence
Department of Energy
- Dr. John C. Browne
Director
Los Alamos National Laboratory

Let me welcome our witnesses and thank you for agreeing to appear before the committee on such short notice.

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